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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The Figure, Emotion, and Color

by

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Intro

As a ceramic artist clay gives me a material that can be molded, beaten, and driven into conforming to the torment of the human spirit. I chose the human figure as the catalyst of my work because it is where I believe emotions are stored. The colors and textures of the forms represent the pain of emotions.

The purpose of this thesis is to make three-dimensional paintings using clay. The human figure is the catalyst for the subject matter. These figures describe selected emotional ideas. Reactions to such ideas as fear, hate, and anger are brought to the surface of the paintings through the color and texture of the forms.

The work comes from the denial of emotions. My aim is to confront the viewer with these emotions. The forms I use are intended to bring the anxiety of the mind to life. To face the work requires me to confront my fears. To escape this confinement, I must first resolve my fears.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

This research was not to emulate and/or enhance a style of art from the past, rather to come to a personal understanding of myself. The works are based on my beliefs toward aesthetics and my philosophical opinions as they have been developed.

We all carry baggage of our lives around in parts of our minds. This baggage impacts upon what happens to us every day and how we proceed through life. The things we learned in school, were taught by our parents, or just common experiences are meshed with all the elements around us that are not-human. I work to understand myself, not so the masses will understand me. The public is left to find their own meanings in art.

My work is based on a marriage of concept and material. Once an idea is constructed in my head, it is merely an action that releases it. For this thesis, I worked on several pieces simultaneously allowing myself to reconfigure structural ideas in the working process. Emotion is the most accessible element in my work. The materials are not the first consideration, rather are dictated by the concept.

At what point the work starts or ends is not relevant nor should it be. If my work becomes too precious, I believe it needs to be destroyed. I take what I have learned and expand it. Doing this I want the work to be judged as a complete object not by it's parts. In attempting to eliminate the first object, I will transform or condense the idea making it more specific, and more readable as the pure thought intended.

To gain greater understanding of my art and the symbolism in it, I looked at how I perceive art to explain my aesthetic. My aesthetic background has been influenced by John M. Anderson's ideas in his book The Realm of Art.

Anderson sets the goal of the book to describe what he calls an "Aesthetic Occasion" (#1). As in every philosophy there are terms in the definition that need to be addressed. There are four types of responses that are commonly given to all art. Anderson refers to these as "Ordinary Responses" (#2). These responses are "Intellectual, Emotional, Practical, and Moral" (#3).

These responses range from details like period, schools of thought, or stylizing (Intellectual); that you will relate the art work to a feeling rather than let it stand on it's own (Emotional); to take an art work and decide how it may be used and how it may be exploited (Practical); to judge a work based on your opinion of social values (Moral).

If the viewer is aware of these responses and can control them, he/she may be one step closer to reaching the goal of my work, an aesthetic occasion. An aesthetic occasion can be had by two different sources, the artist and the appreciator. There needs to be a situation in which the art-object can have a conversation with the audience. This talking is what Anderson would like us to think of as "Symmetry" (#4). Not in the sense that both sides are equal, but rather an act of equal push and pull between art-object and appreciator. With symmetry, you are totally lost in this conversation. The one problem is that there are no answers, but too many questions. You learn to come to grips with the feeling of helplessness.

What my work is trying to accomplish with symmetry is an understanding of the "living figure" and "beauty" (#5,6). These two major parts of symmetry involve the work and the appreciator. I want my work to allow the viewers the opportunity to see something new every time they look at each piece. Each time surprising themselves with a new sense of the complete emotion finding beauty in the work. According to Anderson's book, beauty is the visual

movement between a piece of work and the artist (or appreciator) that is constantly changing. The movement of changing beauty is known as the living figure of the work. The experience is changing as the movement happens and re-happens. These processes take time to achieve and if the work is successful then the aesthetic experience becomes a never-ending loop of rediscovery.

Alberto Giacometti, Pablo Picasso, and Philip Rawson all speak about the rediscovery that art should and does stimulate in the artist and the viewer. My intention is to awaken people to their fears. These works are personal records of my life. This point can be furthered by using Pablo Picasso as reference.

" How can you expect an onlooker to live a picture of mine as I lived it? A picture comes to me from miles away: who is to say from how far away I sensed it, saw it, painted it; and yet the next day I can't see what I've done myself. How can anyone enter into my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts, which have taken a long time to mature and to come out into the daylight, and above all grasp from them what I have been about- perhaps against my own will?"(#7)

In this new found beauty the viewer must find his/her own intuitive experience. Taking the everyday sights, sounds, and smells to the level beyond the state of conscious thought. Taking these things to the point that it no longer matters where you are because you are a part of the thing being observed. I, as the viewer, am now observing myself through the object once controlled. This thing has brought me back to the point of innocent wonder. I no longer concern myself with the surroundings I found the object, or why it was there to be found. What I now think about is: Why it is important to me to find it in myself? : What does it have in common with the beholder? : Why does the work care that I know?

What is so important about this is that it has brought me to the point of "Intuitive Experience" (#8). I cannot explain to the work nor it to me but, it is there. The object is a means to leave the conventional areas of thought and regress.

What is important to all the work is the presentation and representation. Presentation is the format in which the artist gives the appreciator the art object. For instance, a human figure may be a line or a fully painted form. Representation is what the artist is portraying in the work. An aspect that some may have difficulty understanding is the presentations of the figure. These are merely abstracted ideas based on the figure. These are my symbols for myself.

My work should be taken for what it is, emotions. The human changes, as does the clay. There is no elaborate discussion about the "arts' meaning" because it is there for the viewer to gain his own dialog.

ABOUT THE WORK

I began with the most naive approach, using simple gestures from the figure. These were relief paintings on large slabs of clay. They were lacking content.

This forced me to narrow the scope in my approach and concentrate on the figure in situation. The reference to the figure became more abstracted. The figure was used as if the viewer was inside the figure, seeing what the individual would recognize as their own space. To accomplish this, I decided to explore the emotion fear.

I concentrated on my fear of claustrophobia. The approach was to create spaces that were so chaotic that I was sent into a frenzy. The scale in these varied. The first attempts were to make them life size. Here the draw back was that they were not intimidating because they were simply depictions of a closing space.

To react against these I created the same images in scales ranging from four (4") inch squares to one half (1/2") inch squares. These were more successful in the illusion of cramped space but, proportion was needed to understand the relief of the surface.

Again, I was putting too much responsibility on the viewer. I would present the anxiety that I felt would best describe my thoughts in that situation but, in describing irrational ideas in the rational world the meaning was lost. The problem that I was having at this time was trying to show ideas on a universal level that are truly personal emotions.

The next approach was to internalize the idea. Scale also became important to the construction of these works. They became slightly larger than life size. Large thrashing marks could now be made without the fear of weakening

the structural aspect of the piece. These pieces were made using coil building techniques.

The works were based on small models that took only a few minutes to make. In the construction of the large works the spontaneity was lost. After studying the models I decided that I could throw the pieces faster than I could coil build.

I began throwing large closed forms and paddling them. The forms were six (6") inches to twenty-four (24") inches in height. I would deform the thrown orb until it no longer looked like a closed cylinder. I realized that to create larger environments grouping could be used. A series of pieces were made varying in numbers of two (2) through five (5). Again the figure was used only as reference to the human in situation.(see figs. #1-2) Here the problem was not with the structure, but in the forms. They appeared to be about the inner volume rather than the total mass. I was interested in working with mass.

The simplest way to do this is with massive blocks of clay. Forms were created out of large clay sections. They were able to withstand the impact of tools and human hands to create interesting textures and many surface treatments.(see fig. #3)

What the work lacked was striking colors. They were all earth tones. Subsequently lacking the draw of attention that work of this scale demands. I felt the work left the viewer guessing about the emotion portrayed. The expression and treatment of the clay were there but without bold color they seemed to be missing a huge chunk of information. They seemed to be unfinished.

This approach brings us to the current work. This work is in culmination of

all that has come before it. Taking my painting experience from my first attempts, building techniques and space relations of past series, and the response obtained by working with solid clay to create something new.

Each piece has it's own deeper meaning, however the body of work shares ideas throughout. These figures suffer from loss and pain. They lack the ability to contain themselves as society would dictate. These are depictions of how the characteristics of loss and pain show up in my mind. Each figure is only seeing himself. Their appearance is justified in the mind of anxiety. They suffer from despair. Each figure is distraught in his own way. The twist in the head, neck, or the torso shows the strain that each is enduring.

The characteristics in the pieces are being portrayed not only by the three-dimensional form but, they are reinforced with color. Drawings and paintings were done as studies of the works in two dimension.(see figs. #4-11) The different hues and shades used to represent highlights and shadows are unusual. Basic color theories agree that shadows are made using shades of colors. The use of bright red as a shadow is not common.

The textures and surface patterns are also different. They do suggest the contours that are normally associated with the human figure. Using subtle variations they seem to stray from the path just enough to make the viewer wonder how the body could be conformed into these positions.

An example of this use of texture is "Writhing in Misery".(see figs. #12-13) This character shows all the pain in the flesh. He is being twisted throughout. The torso swings from left to right so severely that the ribs are stretching the fabric that holds him together. The neck also shows the lines of pain as they course upward toward the head. The face and head look to the sky as if asking for some relief. The face has become so distraught that the

features are almost undiscernible and the head has begun to grow limp as it seems to almost rest on the neck as an emptying sack.

Some figures are presented in a flat format. This symbolizes a lack of substance. Not physical substance but emotional. These characters are at the end of their rope. They can do nothing more than sustain life. Their outward appearance is of no concern any more. It is taking all they have to remain a constant form. The character is overwhelmed with his struggle and portrays no other side than his grief.

"Fury of Insanity" (see figs. #14-15) is an example of this flat formate. The appearance of this character can be seen as four sided. Each side shows the strain on the person. He is in control of nothing. The fury or anger that has consumed him is shown through the use of contrasting blacks and reds. His exterior is also showing the texture that has been cut away to the bare essentials. His rage is overwhelming.

The characters with two heads are in constant conversation with themselves. They are the two sides of everyone. We all have conversations with ourselves. The problems begin when you start answering your own questions. Here, the voice of reason is beginning to be drowned out. They cannot silence their own voices. In losing his sanity, each character has become more and more engulfed in the alter ego that he cannot evade. Because they occupy the same being they are in constant struggle for dominance. I believe that in too many people today, the good that lives in each is being overshadowed by the hatred and pain. It is as if they are leading themselves through Hell. Each step remembering; Man is his own worst enemy.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I set two main goals for myself: First to try something new; Second to create three-dimensional paintings. I feel that I have done both. I had never tried to create large sculptural paintings before. I have proven that I can now do this as well as grow to explore the idea to an even fuller extent. The second goal was to create three-dimensional paintings based on emotions and to incorporate the human figure. Both issues were met head on.

This research has made me realize that there is much left to do. This was not a one year investigation, rather a trail that will be followed for many years to come. To say that I have done all that I can with this idea is naive. This will grow into something I cannot even begin to imagine. I have begun a long journey.

TECHNICAL

The body of work was built out of solid pieces of clay. Each work was constructed around a wooden support. The support was used as a guide to cut the piece into two equal halves. These halves were then hollowed until they were of uniform thickness. When they were leather hard, the halves were reattached.

Surface texture was applied in two stages. It was done first as the piece was being built. This was to give some idea of the finished product. The refined surface was achieved after the work was hollowed and reassembled. Two treatments were used so as not to destroy the texture while handling the piece in the construction process.

Color was achieved using a variety of material. First and foremost was the color of the clay. Three different colors were used. I started with a low fire, buff, sculpture body. The white clay was achieved by adding Tile 6 to this and red by adding Red Art.

The secondary colors were created with terra sigallatas, clay body slips, mason stains, and finally low fire glazes. The glazes were added after the first firing.

The glazes were added to intensify the somewhat dry color of the others. Bright red, yellow, and orange glaze was used because they cannot be achieved through sigallatas or stains. After the glaze, secondary layers of terra sigallatas and stains were applied, the works were fired for the last time.

**see appendix #1 for clay and glaze formulas

Appendix #1 Clay and Glaze formulas

*c/04 Handbuilding Buff

Foundry Hill Cream- 53

Hawthorne - 18

OM4 - 18

Talc - 12

total - 100

for white add 25lbs Tile 6

for red add 25lbs Red Art

*c/04 Black Terra Sigallata

OM4 - 100 gms.

Black Copper Oxide- 20%

Red Iron Oxide - 20%

H2O - 50%

*c/04 Shaner White

Frit 3124 - 50

Ball Clay - 10

Flint - 10

Zircopax - 5

Black Raku\ Green Raku

Gertsley Borate - 80

Neph. Syn. - 20

Copper Oxide - 7

Cobalt Oxide - 3

FOOTNOTES

- #1- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. pages 36, 56-68, 128-137, 166, 181
- #2- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. pages 6, 11, 17-24.
- #3- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. pages 4, 6, 7, 9, 17-24, 35.
- #4- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. page 42.
- #5- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. page 45.
- #6- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson. pages 163, 167, 170-2, 180.
- #7- Surrealists on art, Lucy R. Lippard. pages 189-91
- #8- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson.

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- 1- THE REALM OF ART, John M. Anderson.

DIALOGUE PRESS; Penn State University, Pa. Copyright 1967

- 2- Surrealists on art, Lucy R. Lippard.

Prentice Hall; Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Copyright 1970



FIGURE #1



FIGURE #2



FIGURE #3

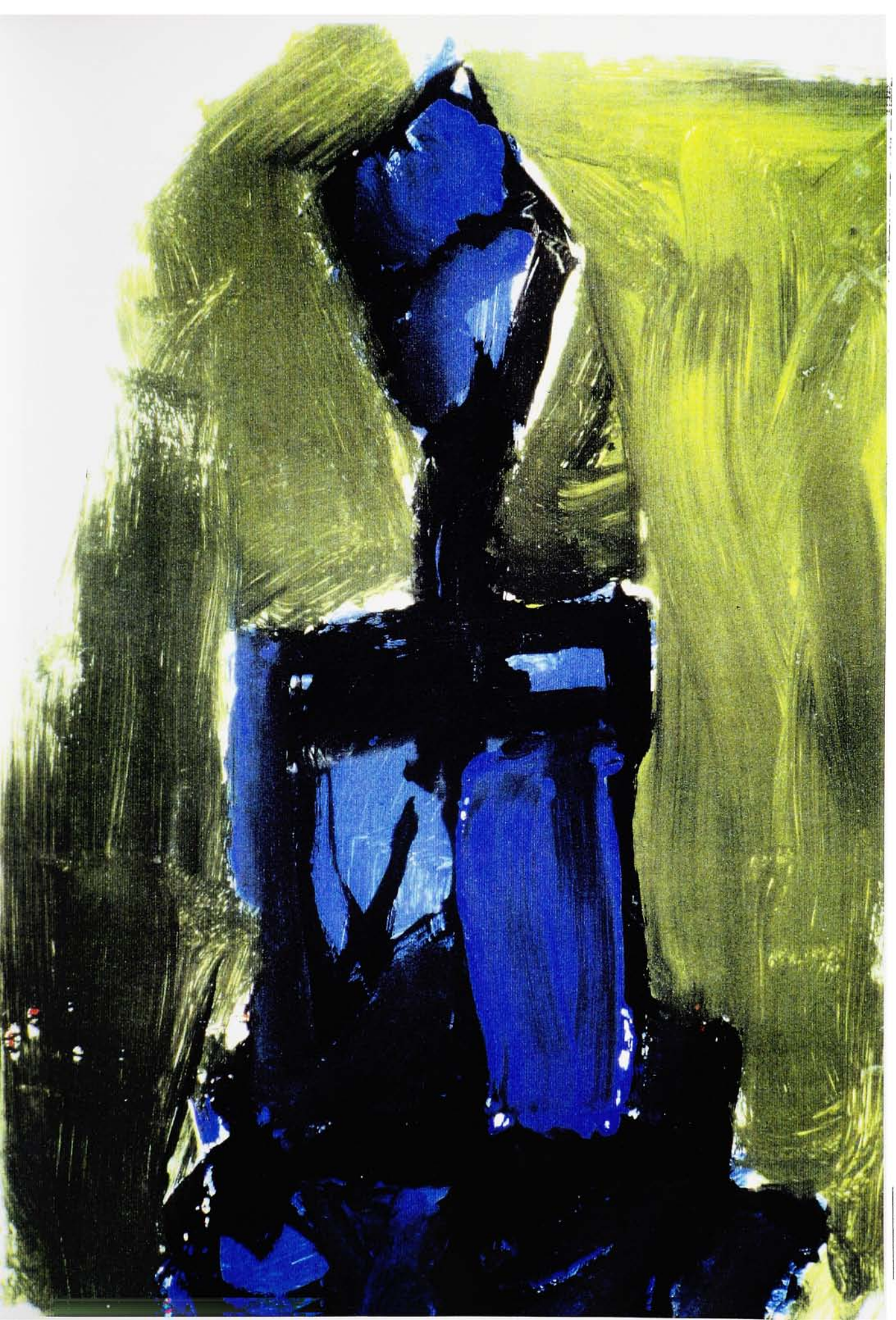


FIGURE #4



FIGURE #5



FIGURE #6



FIGURE #7

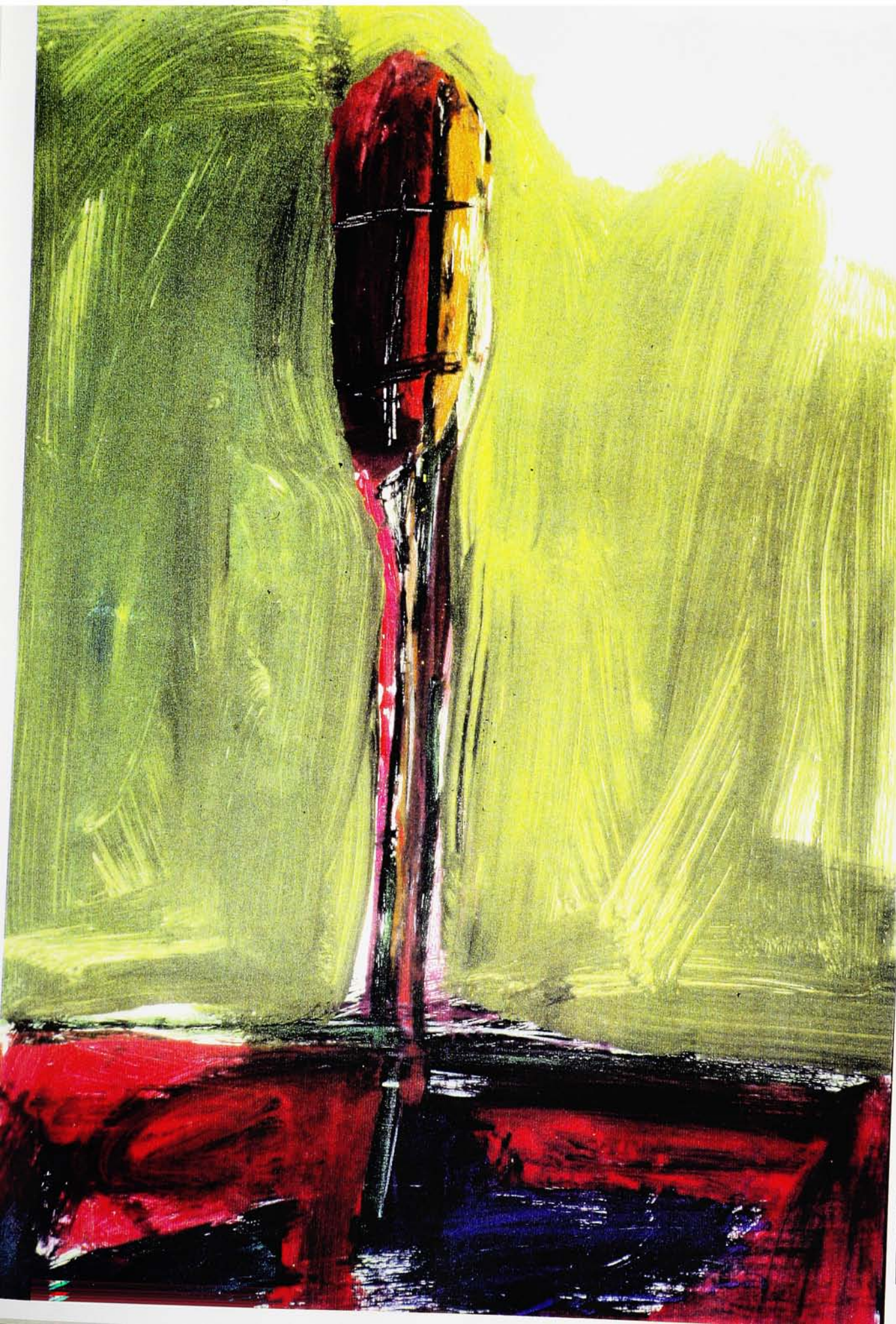


FIGURE #8

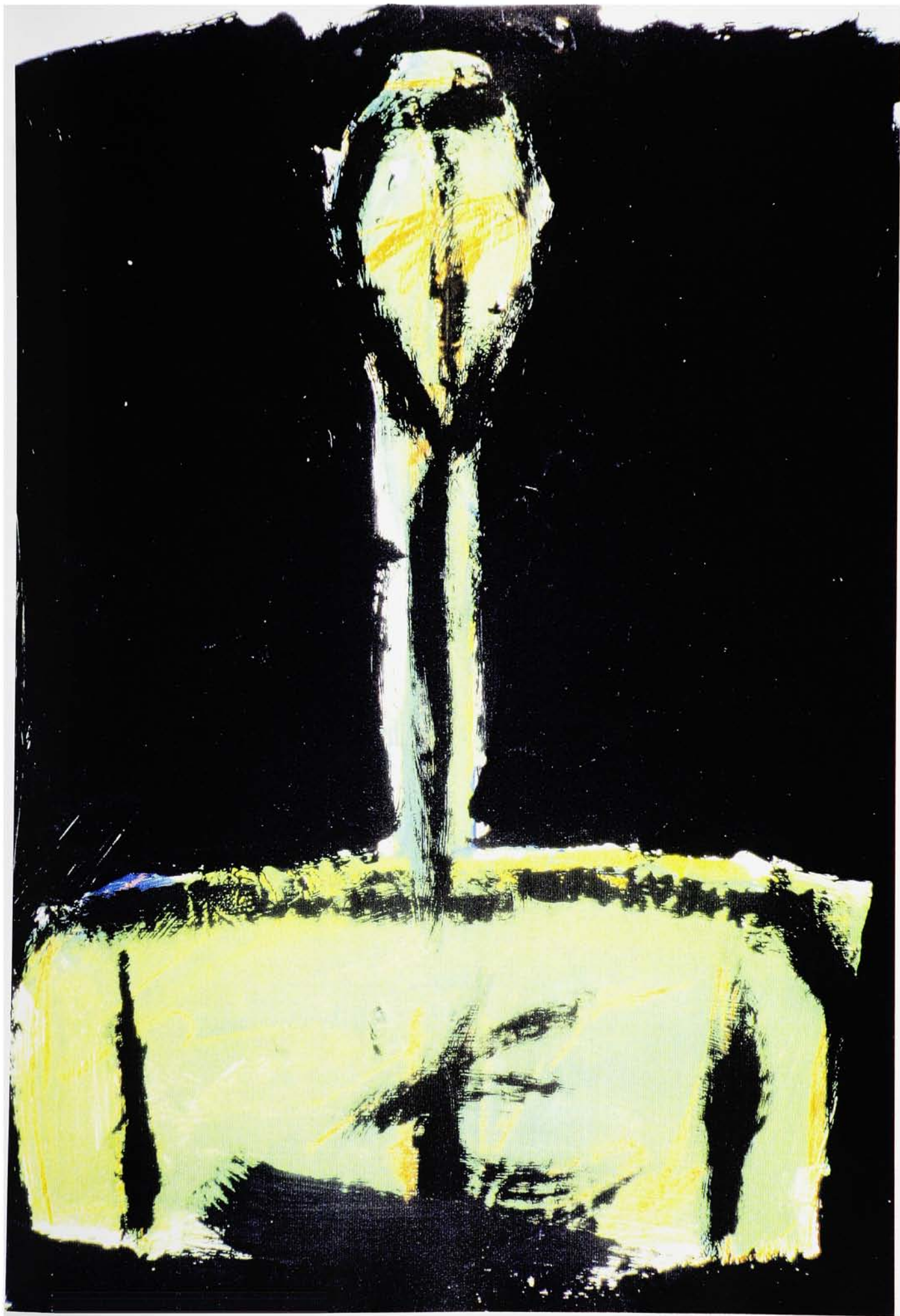


FIGURE #9



FIGURE #10



FIGURE #11



FIGURE #12



FIGURE #13



FIGURE #14

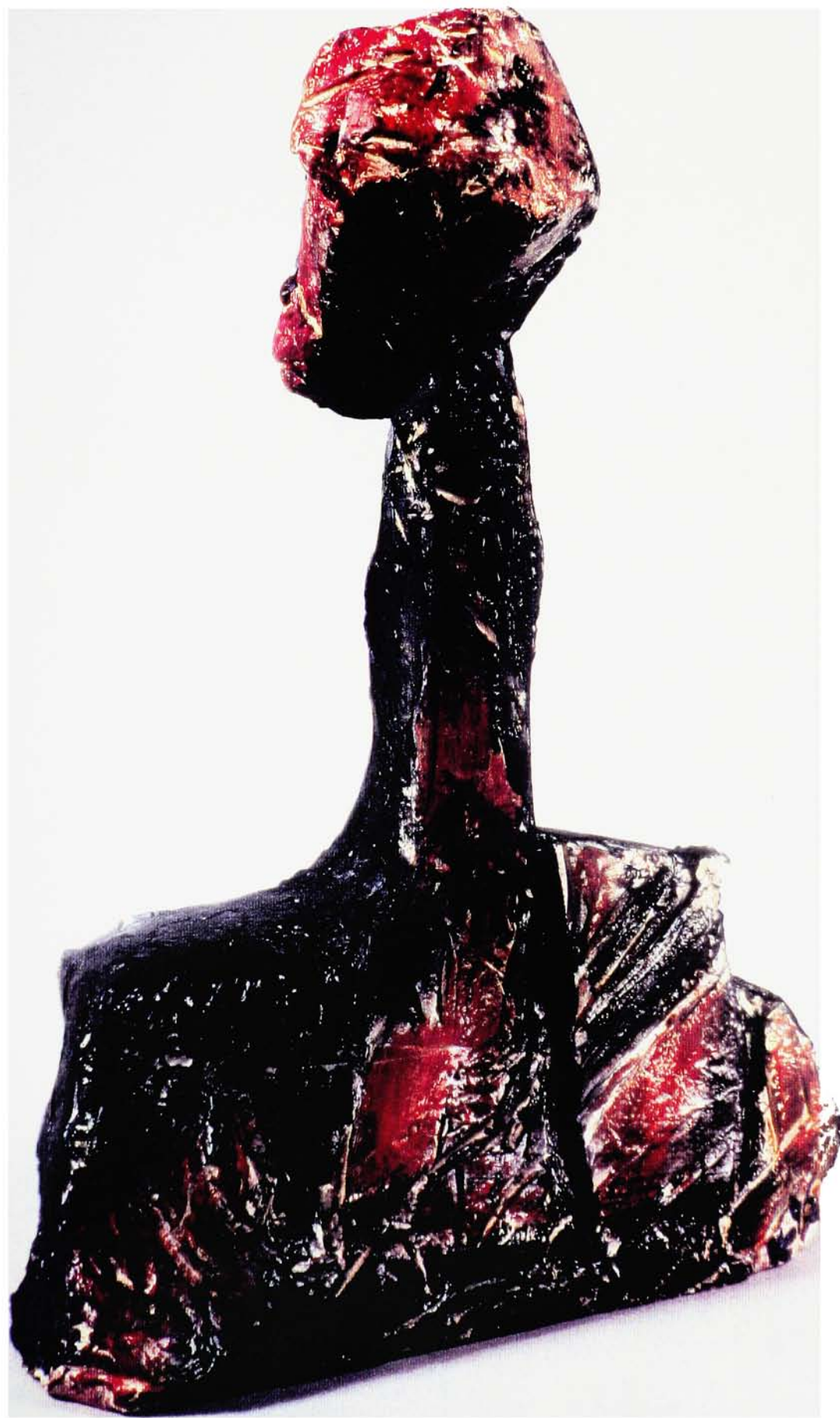


FIGURE #15